

Communications Tips & Techniques Series

Successful Speeches

You don't have to be a polished speaker to share your agency's message, but you must be able to communicate effectively. It takes time and effort to craft an effective speech. Here's how to make your speeches more successful:

Know Your Audience: Find out who and how many will be present, their ages, interests, and occupations. Will they be friendly? If not, why not? What is the format of the meeting and the context of your speech? Will there be speakers before and after you? What will they discuss? Who will introduce you? Will there be a question and answer period? How long will you be expected to speak? What are the physical arrangements? What does the room look like? Where will you stand? Will you have a podium? Do you want one? Will you have a microphone? Will the speech be recorded? Will media be there? Can you have visual aids?

Know Your Subject: Public speaking is stressful under the best of conditions. But there is nothing worse than speaking to an audience without having a firm grasp of the material you're presenting. There is no substitute for knowledge of the subject. Don't speak unless you have that knowledge. If, in an emergency, you must speak on a subject you don't have a firm grasp of, immediately tell the audience you are not an expert.

Have a Clear Goal: What is your goal? Organize your presentation around it. Is your goal to inform or to persuade the audience? Appeals to reason and emotion can be effective, but a persuasive speech supported by sound evidence is more effective than a speech without it. You should restate your basic message more than once. Repetition helps audiences remember.

Prepare Thoroughly: If you don't have time to prepare thoroughly, don't accept the assignment. Public speaking is just like any other task—to do it successfully requires your time, effort, and preparation.

Create a Catchy Opening: You can grab the audience's attention immediately with a startling fact or provocative opinion. You can use a concrete illustration, a quote, or a humorous incident. Or you can ask a rhetorical question that makes people think.

Limit Your Topic. Convey no more than three or four main points. Your listeners won't remember more than this. Illustrate the points with examples. Guide the listeners clearly and easily from point to point. Use your conclusion to stress the purpose of your talk. But leave no doubt about your central idea and what you've tried to say.

Introduce Yourself. Take some time to prepare your own one-page introduction. Provide a copy to the person who will introduce you. Bring an extra copy with you just in case. Also, bring an extra copy or two of your speech in case anyone wants a copy.

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